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# A HISTORY OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT in Canada

Government  
Publications

**CARD OF MEMBERSHIP**

## ONE BIG UNION

**NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL UNION OF  
THE DOMINION OF CANADA**

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may be called upon.

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Address .....

Witness .....

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are  
heavy laden, and I will give you rest," saith  
the Lord.

(To be Returned to Head Office)



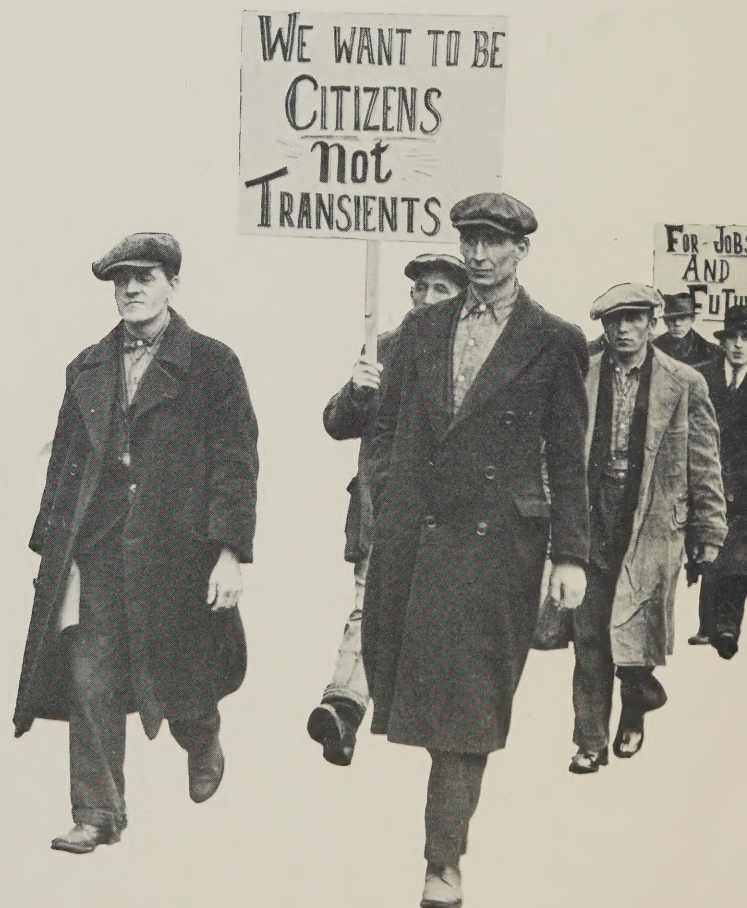


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1. Through Lies of Silence

2. Toward the Citadel

2 programs/60 minutes each

Producer: Robert Gardner

This booklet is meant to accompany the two OECA television programs named above which trace the history of the labour movement in Canada.

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## Introduction

Seldom, in the events that shape history, is there an absolute right or wrong, for individuals are fallible and each acts according to his own best interests. Nowhere can this be more clearly seen than in events that shaped the history of labour in Canada.

Certainly, the upstanding, God-fearing citizens of earlier days would have been shocked at the idea that *they* were exploiting new immigrants and those further down the economic scale than themselves. They were simply looking after their own concerns.

Yet, despite the pat school-book image of the pioneer who prospers through the sweat of his own brow, large numbers of early Canadians existed in dire poverty. From the time they set foot off the boats, both children and adults were exploited by the very society on which they had pinned their hopes. Working long hours for minimal wages, they had no redress for injustices, no voice to speak up for their rights.

Out of this explosive situation, the labour unions in Canada were born. They started in the skilled trades with the typographers and engineers, later moving into the unskilled areas to represent the workers there. And each time a new wave of immigrants arrived or a depression hit the country, painfully won gains were set back a pace.

In the past, attempts to chronicle the story of labour in Canada have pretty well been confined to the history of institutions, with the proliferation of titles making events almost unintelligible for the lay reader.

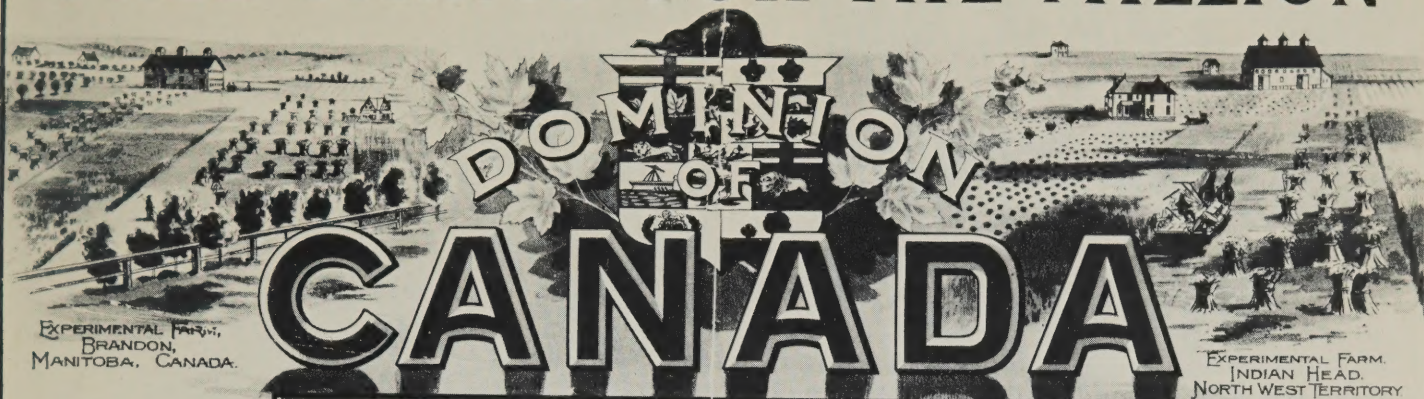
It is for this reason that the producer of these programs has chosen *not* to detail events as they happened, but rather to interpret the emotional climate – to look at the complex social and political events through the eyes of individuals, through their dashed hopes and their frustrations.

Contemporary people – immigrants, “upright citizens,” politicians, youngsters working in sweat shops – all voice their feelings against a background of archival photographs, early film footage and the songs of the labour movement itself. Thus, the producer has attempted to give a sympathetic – and hopefully unbiased and realistic – picture of the period from the mid 1800’s to 1969 as people began to realize they had a *right* to decent conditions and worked to do something to improve them.

“Through Lies of Silence” has as its starting point the influx of immigrants in the 1840’s. Then, despite the promise of a better life for newcomers, children worked an average 60 hours a week; oppressive working conditions, disease and a lack of basic social rights were the norm. The Church preached tolerance in this world and justice in the Great Hereafter, while industrialists, profiting from cheap labour, were conspicuously silent.



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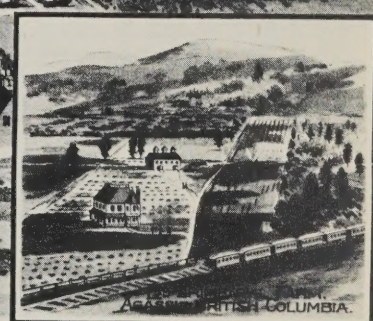
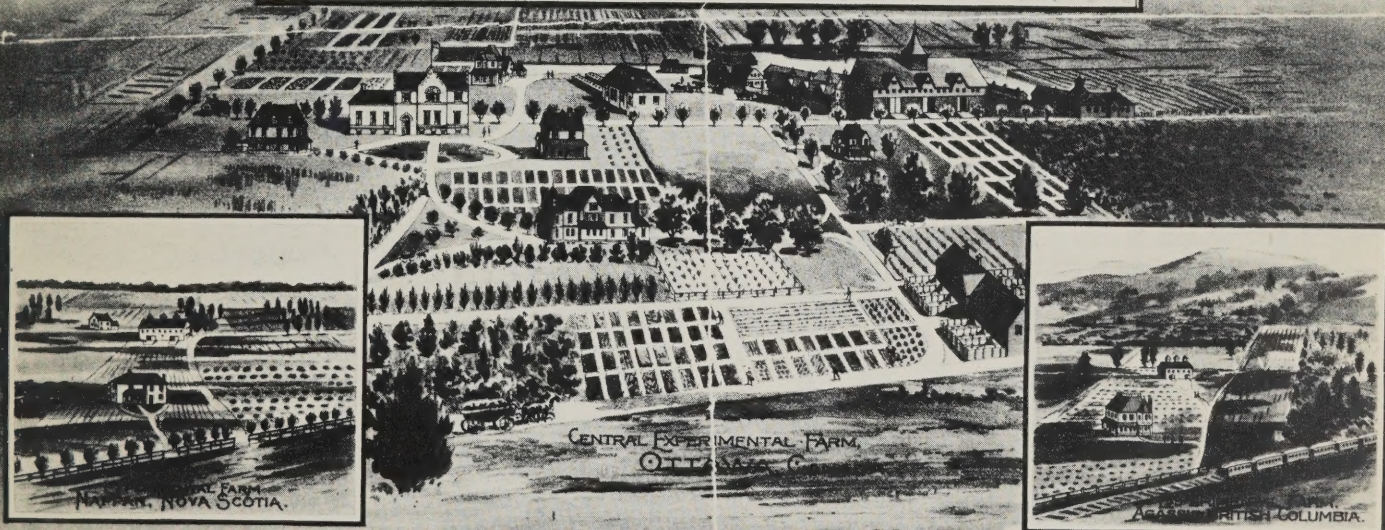
**Railway from Ocean to Ocean.**



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1905



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Provided farm laborer excursionists have worked at harvesting not less than thirty (30) days, and produce certificate to that effect, that will be returned to original starting point in the east until November 30th, 1906, at

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Excursionists CANNOT purchase accommodation on Tourist Sleeping Cars.

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5 Mounted "specials" (men sworn in as police after dismissal of the regular force) charge crowd on Main Street during Winnipeg General Strike.

6 Children were among the most defenseless victims of exploitation.

7 Coal mining at Estevan, Saskatchewan, 1912.





The program deals with the plight of British orphans (Barnardo babies) shipped to this country, with the Chinese coolies who built the railways, with the waves of immigrants cast adrift on the prairies and with the effect of the Boer War and World War I on the rights of labour and unions.

“Be patriotic and join the army,” was the cry of nationalists and politicians. Yet labour leaders were asking, “Why should we risk our lives? For what?” Returning veterans got their answer in a society without work and in wages frozen at earlier levels.

The Winnipeg Strike, which ends the program, indicated a new awareness on the part of Labour that the power controlling Canada could be challenged. At the time, Winnipeg seemed a place of defeat for unions and for those who believed in unions – but the implications of *Winnipeg* changed the face of Canadian society.

“Toward the Citadel,” the second program, goes on to describe the growth in power of the labour movement in Canada as it becomes more self-conscious, more literate and increasingly disciplined. Labour-oriented governments assume power and broad social programs, previously unthinkable, are initiated.

After years of meagre wages and shoddy working conditions, workers of the '20's began to demand their share of profits – much to the alarm of both government and industry bosses. What began to develop was a long, hard struggle to make government and industry aware of their demands and of the need for union representation.

Along the way, there were successes. In the 1930's, automobile workers at Oshawa fought bitterly against both management and the government of Premier Mitchell Hepburn. But they won the right to organize.

In 1946, striking Hamilton steel workers overcame Prime Minister Mackenzie King's attempt to take over the industry and won better working conditions.

In Quebec, in 1949, the honeymoon between church and state ended when church leaders and mine workers together forced Prime Minister Duplessis to improve safety conditions in the mines.

Unemployment insurance, medicare, family allowances and old age pensions – all are today results of successes scored along the way by workers and unions together.

There is a sense in the programs that Labour has had difficulty telling its story. The whole colourful chronicle has been silently ignored, and yet the story – whether it rouses your sympathy or your anger – is *worth* a hearing.



## Significant Dates in the History of Labour in Canada

*In order to heighten their emotional impact, "Through Lies of Silence" and "Towards the Citadel" have been structured to de-emphasize names and dates.*

*The following chronology may be of value to viewers as a time framework in which to place events seen in the programs.*

9



Immigrants clearing and breaking the soil.

**1825**

The Erie Canal is opened. The canal building period necessitated large numbers of unskilled labourers.

**1827**

Printers organize a union in Quebec.

**1830**

Between 1830 and 1839, 263,089 immigrants arrive at the port of Quebec.

The Welland Canal is opened.

11



Interior view of the Ottawa Free Press, 1908.

**1833**

Printers organize in Montreal and Hamilton.

**1844**

Toronto typographers establish a union.

Five of the Tolpuddle martyrs (a group of working class Englishmen) emigrate to London, Ontario, to escape persecution for their union beliefs.

**1847 – 1850**

A time of depression in Canada. With each depression there is a withering away of unions.

**1835**

William Lyon Mackenzie and the typographers at his newspaper disagree over wages.

**1850**

The British Amalgamated Society of Engineers establish a local in Canada.

**1850 – 1858**

Railway construction in Canada booms. Chinese coolie labourers employed in large numbers in the construction.

**1852**

Toronto tailors strike against the threat of automation posed by the Singer sewing machine.

**1860**

The British Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners becomes the first permanent union in the building trades.

**1861**

The first American controlled union enters Canada to organize the iron molders.

**1866**

A period of depression.

**1867**

Another American union, The Knights of St. Crispin (shoemakers), is established in Canada.

**1870**

A time of depression in Canada.

**1871**

Five craft unions form the Toronto Trades Assembly. This move represents an early effort on the part of unions to form an organization that crosses "skill" lines.

**1872**

Printers, who work for George Brown at the *Globe* in Toronto, strike for a nine-hour day. Twenty-four leaders are jailed on charges of criminal conspiracy.

**1873**

Toronto Trades Assembly calls a convention to set up a national organization, The Canadian Labour Union.

Severe commercial depression throughout the country.

**1874**

It is no longer necessary to own real estate to qualify as a member of the Ontario Provincial Legislature.

**1875**

D. J. O'Donoghue, a working man called by Mackenzie King the Father of the Canadian Labour Movement, is elected to the Ontario Provincial Legislature.

**1879**

Nova Scotia coal miners form the Provincial Working Men's Association. This organization cuts across "craft" boundaries.

Merry-makers enjoying Labour Day outing.



In the United States, Chinese workers laid the last rail of the Central Pacific. Coolie labourers were also used extensively in Canadian railway construction.

**1881**

The Knights of Labour enter Canada from the United States. They believe that the unskilled, as well as the skilled, have the right to union organization.

**1883**

The Canadian Labour Congress, with national representation, is established.

12



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Are Running a Series of

## CHEAP EXCURSIONS

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To All Points in

**Manitoba,**  
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### THROUGH TRAINS.

No Customs Delay or Expense.

No Quarantine No Transfers  
Quick Time, Superior Accommodation

For further information apply to any  
Canadian Pacific Railway Ticket  
Agent.

**1885**

The "last spike" of the CPR is driven.

**1886**

In the United States, the American Federation of Labour is formed. Unlike the Knights of Labour, the AF of L recognizes that the strike is its principal weapon. It aims at short range objectives.

**1892**

The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada is established. This represents a further attempt to create a national organization.

**1894**

The Federal government establishes Labour Day as a national holiday.

**1896**

Wilfred Laurier leads Liberals to an election victory.

**1899**

The Boer War. Labour figures regard this conflict as being against the best interests of the working class. It is felt that the working man will be exploited on the battlefield without any hope of reward.

**1900**

The Federal Department of Labour is established. *The Labour Gazette* is published with MacKenzie King as its first editor.

**1902**

The Knights of Labour organization is expelled from The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (partly because of pressure from Sam Gompers and The American Federation of Labour).

**1907**

The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act is initiated. It provides a means of examining workers' grievances but thinkers within the labour movement regard it as favouring the employers.

**1908**

Unions expelled by the Trades and Labour Congress form the Canadian Federation of Labour.

**1910**

The Laurier Naval Act. Labour in Canada sees this as the bell-weather for Canadian participation in a British war.

**1911**

The Robert Borden Conservative-Nationalist ministry assumes Federal office.

**1914**

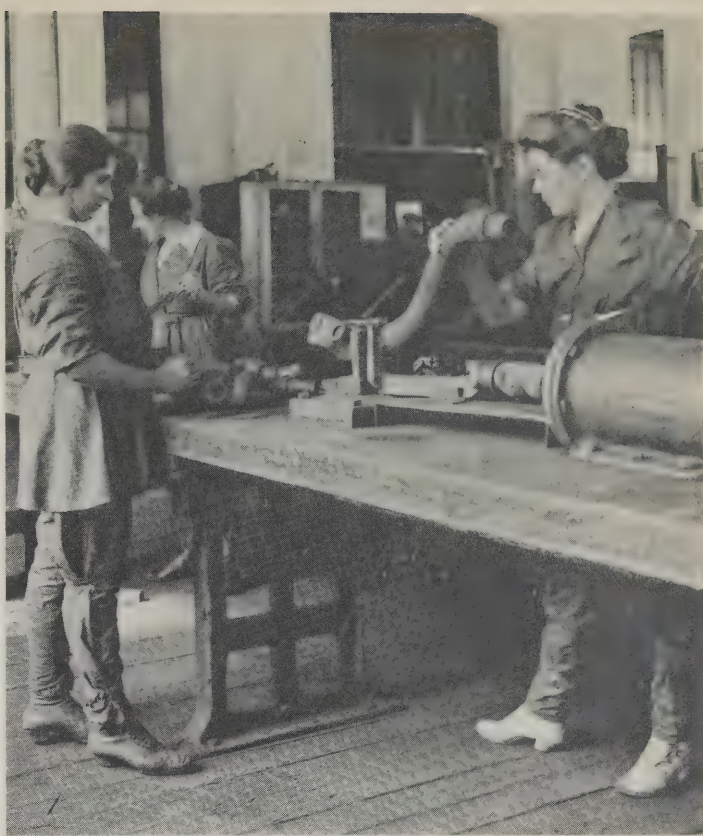
The Great War. Canadian unions seek "profit freeze."

**1915**

Canadian troops stand at Ypres against the first gas attack.

**1917**

A conscription act is introduced. Labour leaders throughout the country regard conscription as an unnecessary burden on the working classes.



Women at work in a munitions factory during World War I.

**1919**

Peace conference at Paris. Certain rights of working people throughout the Western World are enshrined in The Treaty of Versailles. Robert Borden is a signator.

The Winnipeg General Strike. The strike is regarded by the Canadian business community as the first stage in a Bolshevik revolution.

Western unions form The One Big Union. The aims of the OBU

are in accord with radical European union tradition. General strike is considered an important weapon.

William Lyon Mackenzie King The Ontario Department of Labour Act is passed by the newly elected labour-farmer government of Ontario.

**1921**

William Lyon Mackenzie King becomes Prime Minister. J. S. Woodsworth enters Parliament as a Labour MP.



Violence during the Winnipeg General Strike broke out in full force on "Bloody Saturday", June 21, 1919.



Small local Roman Catholic unions form the Canadian Catholic Confederation of Labour. Generally, the Catholic unions are unwilling to use strike as a weapon.

Farmer-oriented governments are elected in Alberta and Manitoba.

Between 1921 and 1931, one and a half million immigrants enter Canada. Unions feel this influx will be a setback for the labour movement.

## 1922

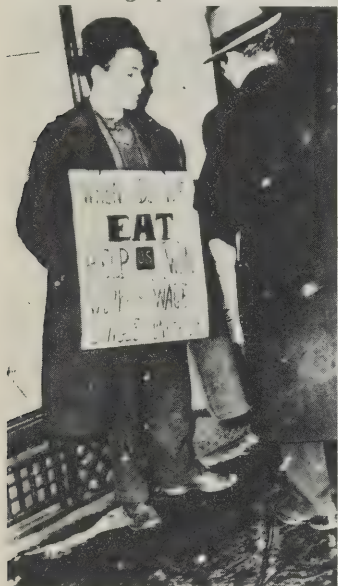
The first regular convention of the Canadian Labour Party. Canadian labour leaders are hoping to copy the success of the Labour Party in Great Britain.

## 1924

Sam Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labour, dies. He is succeeded by a much more moderate man, William Green.

## 1926

J. S. Woodsworth, Leader of the labour members of Parliament (Ginger Group), forces Mackenzie King's liberal government to adopt the principle of the old age pension.



Typical urban scene in Canada during the Depression.

## 1927

The Canadian Federation of Labour and other national unions form the All-Canadian Congress of Labour, dedicated to industrial and national unionism. The ACCL feels that the unskilled should be given the benefits of unionism.

## 1928

Largest wheat harvest on record. The country is suffused with optimism.



Strikers from Unemployment Relief Camp en route to eastern Canada to march on Ottawa, June, 1935.

## 1929

The economic crash and the beginning of the Great Depression.

## 1930

R. B. Bennett, a businessman and millionaire, becomes Prime Minister.

Canada establishes new barriers to Canadian emigration to the United States.

Between 1921 and 1931, one and a half million immigrants enter Canada but eight out of every ten subsequently seek entry to the United States.

Workers' Unity League founded. Self-admittedly Communist in its bias.

## 1931

There is a violent strike at Estevan, Saskatchewan, on September 8.

## 1933

Franklin Delano Roosevelt is elected President of the United States. He is quoted as saying that if he worked at a factory, the first thing he would do would be to join a union.

## 1933

J. S. Woodsworth is elected Leader of the CCF. (The CCF brings together the United Farmers of Canada, the League for Social Reconstruction and the Socialist Party of Canada.) CCF stands for Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. The founding convention produces "The Regina Manifesto."

## 1934

Mitchell Hepburn, a man whose career demonstrates his lack of sympathy for labour unions, becomes Liberal Premier in Ontario.

## 1935

Wagner Labour Relations Act passed in the United States. Far in advance of any similar Canadian legislation, The Wagner Act strengthens the negotiating power of unions. The Canadian Labour Movement is anxious to have the same benefits.

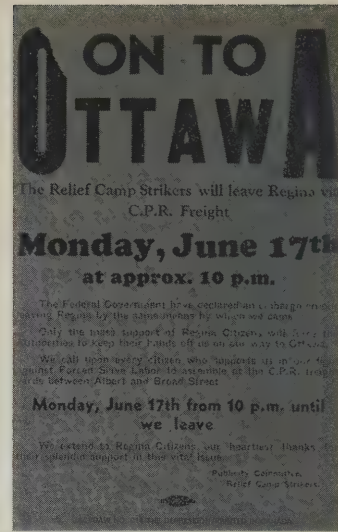
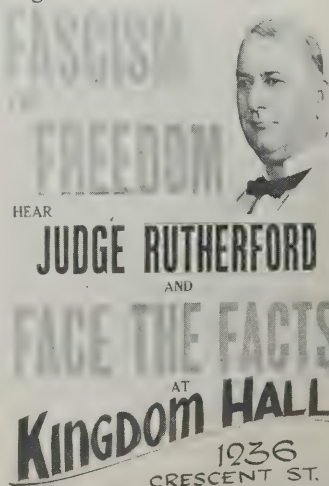
Social Credit Party gains power in Alberta.



Women march in Québec to protest the Padlock Law which gave power to the attorney general to padlock premises suspected of distributing communist propaganda.

John L. Lewis breaks with the American Federation of Labour to form the cio (Congress of Industrial Organizations). Lewis wants to break the power of the exclusively craft unions.

In Canada only 9% of the non-agricultural labour forces are organized.



A massed march of the unemployed ends in violence in the Regina Riot.

In the province of Quebec, in the textile industry, the 55-hour week is still common.

## 1936

Auto workers at Flint, Michigan, stage one of the first sit-down strikes.

John L. Lewis allows some cio organizing activity in Canada.

Union Nationale comes to power in Quebec under the leadership of Maurice Duplessis.

## 1937

Memorial Day Massacre in Chicago. Violence persists in the International Labour Movement.

The Duplessis Padlock Law comes into effect in Quebec. It is part of the "red scare" in Quebec and gives the government the power to close establishments of anyone thought to have "seditious" intent.

Auto workers in Oshawa strike against General Motors of Canada.



1938

At the AFL convention (American Federation of Labour) in November, AFL President, William Green, orders the TLC (The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada) to expel the CIO or the AFL will sever its connection with the TLC. TLC is forced to comply with this pressure.

1939

Second World War. Over one million men and women will soon be directly involved in war industries. The majority of unions in Canada pledge to honour a "no strike" pact.

1940

The Congress of Industrial Organizations (in Canada) and the ACCL (The All-Canadian Congress of Labour) combine to form the CCL (The Canadian Congress of Labour). There are now two large rival union organizations in Canada — the CCL and the TLC.

362,223 Canadian men and women belong to unions. The Unemployment Insurance Act is enacted.

1941

The Kirkland Lake strike, one of the most disastrous for labour in Canadian history, fails in almost all its objectives largely because of an anti-union campaign conducted by the press.

In November, Order-in-Council

P.C. 8253 provides for a National War Labour Board. Increases in wages are prohibited save by permission of the Board.

1942

Conscription plebiscite.

1943

In convention, the CCL endorses the CCF as its political arm.

The Liberal government is defeated in Ontario. The CCF is the official opposition.

1944

CCF becomes the government party in Saskatchewan.

1945

In the Federal election, in a "cautious and hesitant move," the TLC endorses the Liberal Party.

The Ford strike at Windsor generates The Rand Formula, which states that it is not necessary for all workers to belong to a union, but that all workers must pay dues.

In the next decade, one million immigrants will enter Canada.

1946

Walter Reuther is elected President of United Auto Workers.

A Royal Commission on Espionage holds in-camera investigations of individuals holding "radical" views.

# The Gazette.

## CONSCRIPTION RIOTERS WOUND 8 POLICE IN CITY

Mobs, Mostly Irresponsible

Youths, Aply Broken Up

18 MEN UNDER ARREST

Windows and Tramcars in  
East of City Stoned—  
Traffic Paralyzed

— Montreal, Thursday, February 12, 1942



Hamilton steelworkers on strike for higher wages and shorter hours, 1946.



1947

CCL, at its convention, discusses the possibility of cleaning the Communists out of British Columbia. The convention also condemns "Soviet Imperialism" and "World Communism."

1948

Mackenzie King resigns. Louis St. Laurent becomes Prime Minister.

1949

Catholic Teachers' Alliance strikes in Montreal. This event, among others, indicates the increasing militance of Quebec unions.

The strike at Asbestos and the undue demonstration of force by the Duplessis government arouse the indignation of Canadians across the country.

The "honeymoon" between Maurice Duplessis and the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour comes to an end. The CCL suspends the United Electrical Workers because of alleged Communist domination.

1950

General railway strike paralyzes the country.



Workers demonstration in protest of unemployment and speculated death of textile industry, brought about by the closing of many textile mills.

1951

The CCL expels the International Fur and Leather Workers' Union for alleged Communist domination. Worried that their credibility will be threatened, major unions dissociate themselves from any Communist affiliation.

1952

Walter Reuther is elected President of the CIO.

George Meany is elected President of the AFL.

The Quebec Federation of Labour protests "the revolutionary mentality" of Catholic national unions. The involvement of Roman Catholic clergy in Quebec unions is diminishing and the unions are taking a more militant stance.

1953

Organizing drive at Eatons. Eventually local 1000 - retail, wholesale and department store union (supported financially by CCL) - loses certification by a small margin.

1957

Murdochville, Quebec. A confrontation between miners and strikebreakers.

Immigration reaches a peak of 280,000.

1958

Nineteen structural steel workers lose their lives while building the Second Narrows Bridge near Vancouver. The labour movement demands higher standards of safety on the job.

CLC convention approves the concept of working with the CCF to form a broadly based "new political party."

CBC producers in Montreal go on strike. The strike weapon is now beginning to be used by white collar workers.

1960

Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour (CCCL) reorganizes and calls itself the Confederation of National Trade Unions. (CNTU). Jean Marchand becomes President of the new labour organization (1961).

1961

Founding convention of the



Forces arrive in Asbestos to control striking workers.



A group of Greek immigrants arrive in Halifax.

1955

Union membership in Canada is 1,268,207.

In December, in the United States, the AFL and the CIO merge to form the AFL-CIO.

1956

TLC and CCL merge to form The Canadian Labour Congress. Claude Jodoin is named President of the CLC. The CLC embraces 80% of all organized workers in Canada.

New Democratic Party (NDP). Stanley Knowles is Chairman of the convention. T. C. Douglas defeats Hazen Argue in the leadership race.

1962

Medicare is enacted in Saskatchewan. Followed by a doctors' strike. Unions agitate to have the Saskatchewan plan implemented on a national basis.

1963

At a unity convention in Win-



nipeg, the National Union of Public Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees merge into a new union – The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

#### 1964

Quebec passes a new labour law extending full labour (union) privileges to all employees below the status of foreman and excepting only policemen and firemen.

The right to organize is won by hospital workers in Quebec.

Members of the typographical union mount a strike against the three Toronto dailies.

#### 1965

Marcel Pélipin takes over as President of the CNTU.

The Quebec Civil Service gains the right to organize.

In the federal election, Ontario unions contribute 55 full-time workers to NDP.

Ten thousand postal workers in seventy Canadian centres go on strike.

#### 1966

Canadian Pension Plan enacted. The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), representing Civil Service employees in the Federal field, becomes one of the largest unions in Canada.

#### 1967

Quebec teachers organize (CNTU).

#### 1968

Liberals, under Pierre Elliot Trudeau, assume power in Canada.

A survey shows that only 9% of Canada's French-speaking population supports the NDP at the polls. 22% vote Conservative; 53% vote Liberal.

#### 1969 – 70's

27% of Quebec labour force is organized.

Union membership in Canada is 2,074,616.

NDP Waffle Group makes its appearance.

At the 1969 convention of the New Democratic Party, organized labour sends only 218 delegates of the 900 present.

Ontario labour movement mounts a campaign against "legalized strikebreaking" in Ontario.



A show of union solidarity in Montréal, 1972.



Police intervention continues to be a contentious issue in labour struggles.



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## Related information

*Labour in Society*.  
Toronto Public Libraries, 1972.

This is a useful booklet describing some readings, plays, novels and films that deal with the labour movement both in Canada and other countries.

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